

News Release



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A Reminder From State Parks

Park Fees Set to Increase July 1st To Offset Budget Cuts and Keep Parks Open

SACRAMENTO – In December 2003, California State Parks announced that in the midst of the continuing budget shortfall, fees would be raised beginning July 1, 2004. The purpose of the increase is to offset budget cuts, provide for a minimum level of ongoing maintenance, and most importantly, to keep the parks open and operating for millions of visitors.

In conjunction with this, State Parks announced on April 5, 2004, that the fees for Annual Passes would begin increasing on April 15, 2004, with graduated increases to follow on May 1, June 1 and July 1, 2004. This was done to insure that increased revenue needed from Annual Passes would be captured for use in the coming fiscal year.

The reason for the increases is linked to what will be happening to Parks' budget when the 2004-2005 State budget is passed. Unless there are changes, and none are anticipated at this point, State Parks will incur a reduction of \$15 million in its operating budget, an amount that will be offset by the fee increases.

In addition to recapturing the \$15 million budget reduction, the fee increase will provide for an additional \$3 million. Of the additional \$3 million, \$1 million will be used to hire the seasonal personnel required to staff the kiosks and entrance stations to collect the fees. The added \$2 million is a minimal amount needed to handle the most critical public safety and maintenance issues throughout the system.

"After repeated budget reductions, we have reached the point where there is no other choice," said State Parks Director Ruth Coleman. "This is a reasonable solution to help get the State through hard budget times and keep the system open and operating."

Since the beginning of the budget deficit problem, virtually all departments of State government have undergone continued budget cuts. State Parks' budget was reduced by \$4.8 million in 2001-2002 and another \$15 million in 2002-2003, a total of nearly \$20 million. In the

forthcoming 2004-2005 budget, another \$15 million will be reduced, replaced by fee increases. However, even with the fee increase, the State Parks budget has still been reduced by about \$20 million over the past three years.

To meet the requirements of the \$20 million reduction, State Parks reorganized its middle and upper management and consolidated 23 statewide park districts down to 18, thereby saving rent, lease, electricity and other overhead costs. The management reorganization and the ongoing hiring freeze reduced the State Parks' work force by nearly 200. Also, State Parks has hired fewer seasonal workers for the summer vacation months.

Most of the State Parks' budget goes to wages and benefits. That means that if the forthcoming \$15 million were cut, with no offsetting fee increase, State Parks would be forced to lay off 250 permanent and 800 seasonal employees. Personnel reductions of that magnitude, on top of previous personnel reductions, would require the closure of an estimated 100 State Parks because there would not be sufficient personnel to operate those parks.

The new fee structure is available on the State Parks web site at www.parks.ca.gov. As an example of fees that visitors will pay after July 1, 2004, day use visitors now pay \$3.00 to \$5.00 per vehicle and will pay \$4.00 to \$10.00 per vehicle. For camping, the base rate increases from a range of \$8.00 to \$13.00 per site before July 1, to a range of \$11.00 to \$25.00 after July 1, 2004. However, some camping fees will be higher, when hook-ups and premium site fees are added.

In order to provide for affordability and access for people of all income levels, the increases are structured to give people choices. Campgrounds and day use sites which have the highest demand and use will have the highest fees. Visitors can find lower fees by searching for inland campgrounds and locations where the demand is less. As an example, campgrounds along the Orange and San Diego County coastlines will cost more, with the beachfront sites costing the most, the inland sites less. Campgrounds inland and in northern areas of the State will cost less.

California's State Park System includes 277 parks with more than 15,000 campsites, 280 miles of coastline and more than 3,000 miles of trails, making it the largest State Park system in the lower 48 states. In addition, it has the highest number of visitors of any State Park system in the entire nation, with more than 85 million visitors yearly, an increase of more than 34 percent in four years.

The high numbers of visitors to State Parks directly spend more than \$2.6 billion dollars yearly in communities surrounding State Parks, making the State Park system a significant part of the economy of many locations in the State. Every year, the vast majority of State Park coastal campsites are full all summer, making State Parks one of the most popular vacation destinations in California.

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